

CONTRIBUTIONS  
TO  
THE MEDICAL HISTORY  
OF  
PENNSYLVANIA.

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## CONTRIBUTIONS, ETC.

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ALTHOUGH it is with feelings of diffidence I have ventured this evening to address you, I shall not attempt to apologize, since it is done in the hope to form a starting point, and encourage others, better qualified than myself, to come forward, rather than from any expectation of being able to contribute materially either to your instruction or amusement. From the many subjects demanding investigation, which have been allotted to us by the Society, I have selected one which is involved in much obscurity, and have collected such facts in connection with it as circumstances have placed in my power.

Considerable difficulty must, necessarily, attend any attempt to elucidate the early Medical History of this country; as but few physicians capable of transmitting to posterity an account of the diseases they were obliged to encounter and the means found most effectual to their relief, would be willing to forego the comforts and advantages of civilized society, to plunge into the dangers and difficulties attendant on an attempt to people the wilder-

ness, and bring the forest under cultivation: and though, from peculiar circumstances attending the settlement of this colony, Pennsylvania seems to have enjoyed the skill of several accomplished and well-educated physicians, I am not able to trace a single paragraph, now extant, in which they have attempted to detail either theory or practice, prior to the year 1740. It is true that the same rage for book-making did not then exist as at present, and no periodical journal offered its pages for short essays, such as men engaged in extensive practice can find time to compose: and most probably could we have access to private letters written to their friends at home, we might there find much information. For the facts contained in the following essay, I am indebted to traditionary report and notes made in desultory reading. From a letter kindly loaned me by my friend, Dr. James, received by him from John F. Watson, of Germantown, I have derived some hints with which he shall be credited as they are mentioned. Prior to the arrival of William Penn, in 1682, even tradition is pretty much silent; and I am not aware of there having been any regular practitioners of medicine among the Swedes.\* Noah Webster, in his book on Pestilence, mentions that the winter of 1641 was

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\* Among the Dutch on the Delaware, the names of two "practitioners of medicine" are mentioned in the early records; but whether in our present acceptation of the term they were "regular practitioners," we are not able to say.

Vice-Director Alrichs, writing on the 25th of May, 1657, from Fort New Amstel (now New Castle), to the "Commissioners of the Colonie on the Delaware," says, "Mr. Jan Oosting, the surgeon, hath given in this annexed memorandum of necessary medicines,

very severe; and that the Swedes, and a colony from New Haven, who had settled among them, suffered very much in the following summer, but does not say what was the disease. In 1647, they again suffered from the influenza, which passed from the northern to the southern extremity of this continent, and is the first epidemic of the kind mentioned in our history. "Such as bled, or used cooling drinks, died; such as used cordials, or more strengthening things, recovered for the most part." In the month of June, 1655, the whole continent was again

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which, he says, will not amount to much. He requests that they will be sent out by the earliest opportunity."\*

In again writing to the same authorities, on the 10th of October, 1658,† he states, "William Van Rasenberg, who came over as Surgeon, puts forth sundry claims against the people whom he attended on the passage, inasmuch as his wages did not run at the time and on the voyage, and he used his own provisions. There were on board the ship considerable sickness, accidents, and hardships, in consequence of a tedious voyage. One hundred souls required at least a hogshead or two of French wine and one of brandy, and a tub of prunes had also to be furnished for refreshment and comfort to those sick of scurvy and suffering from other troubles through the protracted voyage; for, from want thereof, the people became so low that death followed, which is a pretty serious matter. Here, on shore, I see clearly that the poor, weak, sick, or indigent, sometimes, have need necessarily of this and that to support them, which one cannot easily or will not refuse: though it be sometimes but a spoonful, frequently repeated it amounts to more than is supposed. The barber also speaks of a house which Master Jan occupied being too small for him; he hath a wife, servant, and child or children also. If he hire, as he says, at the expense of the city, he shall be obliged to show a paper to that effect. People's words,

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\* Documentary History of New York. Edited by E. B. O'Callaghan, M.D. Vol. II., p. 16.

† Idem, 55.

visited by the epidemic catarrh, which was followed by other fatal diseases. "In the year 1668," says Webster, "appeared a comet with a stupendous coma; this was attended by an excessively hot summer, and malignant diseases in America."

With William Penn there emigrated two Welsh gentlemen, Thomas Wynne and Griffith Owen, who appear to have been regularly educated to the profession; and Wynne is said to have practiced in London. They were both members of the Society of Friends, and were much respected by their fellow emigrants: as we find them repeatedly noticed in the history of the times, and Wynne held the office of Speaker of the first Assembly of the freemen of the province. Some doubt exists as to whether they both located themselves in the city; and I

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or what they verbally produce for their own profit, cannot be accepted."

In a return for monies paid for the "Colonie," we find that between the 18th of November, 1659, and the 3d of November, 1662, William Van Rasenberg, Surgeon in the Colonie, was the recipient of twelve hundred and thirty-eight florins, as salary; and Evert Pietersen, styled "Comforter of the Sick," &c., of fourteen hundred florins; and Arent Pietersen, who bore the same title, of one hundred and fifty florins.\*

In 1658, Alrichs writes, "Our actual situation, which is certainly very distressing, by an ardent prevailing fever, and other diseases, by which the large majority of the inhabitants are oppressed and broken down, besides that our "barber" (surgeon) died, and another well acquainted with his profession, is very sick."† Probably Oosting is referred to as having died, and Van Rasenberg as having been sick. The latter was living in 1662, while the former, in 1660, is styled "late surgeon."—EDITOR.

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\* Id., 179.

† Hazard's Annals, 247.

am inclined to believe that Wynne accompanied his countrymen, who, allured by the resemblance which the tract of country now forming the townships of Merion and Haverford bore to their native hills, generally settled west of the Schuylkill. Though neither of them has left any account of his practice, we may be allowed the inference, that with the exception of the occasional epidemics to be noticed, surgical, rather than medical skill, was had in requisition. Of one thing we are sure, that among the hardy sons of England's yeomanry, who had thus abandoned the comforts of home for conscience sake, they met with few diseases the result of idleness or luxury. Generally speaking, the colonists must have enjoyed good health, as we find Wynne taking an active part in politics, and Owen travelling in the neighboring colonies. The winter of 1697-8, seems to have been one of unusual severity, and the whole of the colonies again suffered from influenza; which, to the north, put on the form (since so well known) of pneumonia typhoides.

In the month of August, 1699, only seventeen years after the arrival of the proprietor and his first colonists, we find the city devastated by a malignant disease, which was productive of distressing mortality. It is noticed in the Journals of Thomas Chalkly and Thomas Story, Ministers of the Society of Friends. The latter was then on a religious visit to this colony, and soon after received the office of Master of the Rolls. He does not enter into any detail as regards the symptoms, but notices the number of *deaths* as at one time amounting to six or

eight daily.\* The malignant nature of the disease may be judged of from the fact that friends from the country were advised to come as little as possible into the city, though the time for holding the semi-annual meeting occurred during its prevalence: and it is noticed by the pious narrator, as an evidence of the superintending care of Providence, that during the session of the meeting, which continued several days, "the plague was stayed." By Isaac Norris, then a merchant in Philadelphia, it is noticed in his correspondence as the "Barbadoes Distemper;" though he says nothing of its being imported; and the only symptoms he mentions are vomiting and voiding of blood. The summer had been the hottest ever known, men having died suddenly from the heat, in the harvest field. The disease commenced in the beginning of August, and abated about the 22d of October, in which time two hundred and twenty persons had died. Dr. Wynne had been dead some years, and the practitioners during its prevalence must have been his son-in-law, Dr.

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\* Story, in his Journal, records the event in the following striking language:

"In this distemper had died six, seven, and sometimes eight a day, for several weeks, there being few houses, if any, free of the sickness. Great was the majesty and hand of the Lord! Great was the fear that fell on all flesh! I saw no lofty or airy countenances, nor heard any vain jesting to move men to laughter, nor witty repartee to move men to mirth, nor extravagant feasting to excite the lusts and desires of the flesh above measure. But every face gathered paleness, and many hearts were humbled, and countenances fallen and sunk, as such that waited every moment to be summoned to the bar and numbered to the grave." (Janney's Life of Penn, Ed. of 1852, p. 404.)—EDITOR.



Edward Jones, who accompanied him in his emigration, and Dr. Griffith Owen, and perhaps his son, who commenced practice about this time. Dr. Owen the elder lived till the year 1717: during the latter years of his life he seems to have relinquished the toils of practice to his son, and to have sought his pleasure in making short excursions with travelling ministers, who notice him in their journals with great respect.

Connected, perhaps, as much with the present as any other branch of investigation, permit me here to notice a fact which has not, heretofore, claimed attention. Among the gentlemen accompanying William Penn on his first visit to this country was one of French extraction, who, proud to have descended from the family of the recluse of Port Royal, and to bear his honored name, had devoted his time and fortune to the study of the abstruse sciences, among others alchemy and astrology. Soon after his arrival, having provided himself with the requisite apparatus, he commenced the vain pursuit after that which has deluded so many, the Philosopher's Stone, and its necessary accompaniment, the Elixir Vitæ. The result need not at this day be told; but among the simple inhabitants of Philadelphia he was regarded as one passing wise; and his secluded habits, joined to the verification of some trifling predictions he ventured to make from reading the aspects of the stars, induced the supposition, with some, that he had made the *dire compact*: and such was the strength of this impression that his house was regarded as the haunt of unquiet spirits, which reputation it bore till within a few months, when it was destroyed to make

room for more profitable tenants. His children kept an apothecary's store, in which they vended many articles the produce of their father's laboratory. About fifty years ago, an old man, who recollected the gentleman referred to, narrated to one of his descendants the foregoing circumstances; and, descanting largely on his benevolence, remarked, "Ah! but he could well afford to be generous; for, what was money to him who could turn lead into gold?" Upon being asked how he knew him to possess the power, he replied, "Surely he should know, since he had not only seen, but possessed, the gold so obtained." Here, however, as elsewhere, the time bestowed on this vain pursuit seems not to have been thrown away; for, in addition to the amusement it afforded to one placed above the necessity of manual labor, and the benefit derived from the useful products of his alembics, which, as before stated, were sold to the inhabitants, one of his sons, profiting by the knowledge derived from his father and his books, produced, if not the Elixir Vitæ, a compound, styled "Golden Drops," as indicative of their value, to this day celebrated in some sections of the country; and which, if we may credit one-third the stories told of it, has performed cures little short of miraculous; and be the compound what it may, for it is still a nostrum in the possession of one of his descendants, is effectual to the relief of most diseases with which any members of the family, who have sufficient faith in its virtues, may be afflicted. In short, it is only cause of wonder that the court of death has not, ere this, been de-

populated, by the annihilation of some of his chief agents in the work of destruction.

About the time of the death of Dr. Owen, in 1717, the medical faculty was reinforced by the arrival of Drs. Kearsley and Graeme, who, with the son of Dr. Owen and Dr. Jones, son-in-law of Wynne, aided by some two or three empirics (who amassed considerable fortunes), formed, I believe, the sole defence of the city and its neighborhood against the inroads of disease. Wearisome enough were the duties of these gentlemen,—the settlements wide scattered, the roads newly made, and the means of conveyance poor. Dr. Graeme seems to have possessed a large property. The house in which he is said to have resided must have been one of “the spacious and splendid mansions” mentioned by some of our older chroniclers. He occasionally retired to Graeme Park, a handsome seat in Bucks County.\* Dr. Kearsley soon acquired the entire confidence of his fellow-citizens. During his life, he was active in procuring the erection of Christ’s Church, one of the most venerable ornaments of our city; and, at his death, in the year 1732, he founded and endowed the hospital for poor widows attached to the church. He left a nephew, also a physician, who became obnoxious to the resentment of the Whig Party, at the commencement of the Revolution, and was subjected to the cruel punishment of tarring and feathering, then occasionally resorted

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\* For some notice of Doctor Graeme, see note at page 459.—  
EDITOR.

to; which so affected him as to cause insanity, which continued till his death.

Early in the eighteenth century, there emigrated from England to Boston, a gentleman of the name of Zachary, who shortly after died, leaving an only child, Lloyd Zachary, then quite a boy, to the care of his uncle who resided in Philadelphia, to which place he was removed, and where he acquired that education which enabled him not only to shine an ornament to his profession, but also to sustain a character unsullied by reproach. Upon the completion of his classical education, he was placed under the direction of Dr. Kearsley; and, after acquiring all the medical information he could impart, sailed for Europe in the year 1723, where he spent three years, and returned to practice among his friends in Philadelphia. He was much beloved, and the interest he took in the hospital, of which he was first physician, is sufficiently indicative of his philanthropy. To it, whilst he was able, he devoted his time and talents, and at his death left it a handsome legacy in money and books, thus contributing to the establishment of one of the many noble charities for which our city is famed. For some years before his death he was afflicted with a paralysis, which carried him to an early grave much lamented. Cotemporary with these was the elder Shippen, who was born and received his entire education in this city, where he practiced during a long series of years. Nor must we pass in silence Dr. Thomas Bond, who, about the year 1734, emigrated from Maryland, fixed his residence in Philadelphia, where he soon acquired great reputation. He was associated with

Dr. Zachary in the care of the hospital, and delivering clinical lectures to the few students of medicine which the city contained at the time of its establishment. There still remains to be mentioned a gentleman who practiced at the time now under review, and who eminently deserves the gratitude of all those who take pride in the scientific character of our city. I allude to Dr. Thomas Cadwallader, the grandson of Wynne. Not satisfied with the information to be gained at home from the instruction of Dr. Jones, he spent some years in Europe, where he matured the knowledge previously acquired, and fitted himself for the distinguished rank he afterward held in the city and its vicinity. The urbanity of his manners, and his uncommon presence of mind, gained him many friends, and form the subject of many anecdotes still current among the descendants of the Welsh families in which he practiced. In the year 1740, he published an essay on the iliac passion, in which he recommends the use of mild cathartics and opiates, in preference to the drastic articles then generally employed. Unfortunately this, which is the first book on a medical subject printed in America, is now out of print, at least so far that I have been unable to procure a copy; and I am indebted for the knowledge that it ever existed to an oration delivered before the Charleston Medical Society, by the late Dr. Ramsay. But his claims to our respect do not rest here. Having, as before noticed, resorted to the European schools for the perfection of that education commenced under the auspices of Dr. Jones, he learned the inestimable importance of anatomical knowledge; and

superior to that petty jealousy and desire to excel his fellow practitioners, which has too often cast a blot on the fair escutcheon of medicine, he resolved to impart the knowledge of the human structure to such of them as had not enjoyed the same opportunity with himself. To this end, he took a house, which, from the location given to it by tradition, must have belonged to that distinguished patron of science, James Logan, in which he gave lessons in practical anatomy. Among others who availed themselves of this opportunity was the elder Shippen, and it is most probable that he here acquired those ideas of the importance of the study, which induced him to press upon his son the propriety of making himself master of the science, in order to the establishment of those lectures he afterward so ably delivered.

The city seems occasionally to have suffered from the prevalence of natural small-pox, and consequently some means for arresting its ravages early claimed attention; and, in 1731, inoculation was fairly introduced, after having struggled against the fears and prejudices of the people during nine years. Many attempts were made during this time to overcome the opposition, but ineffectually. Newspaper essays, and even sermons, were published, denouncing the practice as irreligious—evidencing a distrust of the care of Providence. J. F. Watson, in his MSS., quotes the sermon of a gentleman of the name of Maskelyne, in which he calls it “an unjustifiable art, and an infliction of an evil, implying a distrust of God’s overruling care, to procure a possible future good.” About the year 1730, it seems, however, to have triumphed, and

we find Kearsley, Zachary, Cadwallader, Shippen, and Bond engaged in the practice.

J. Growden, Esq.,\* was the first patient of note who gave it his countenance, by submitting to have the virus inserted into his own system; and the first visit paid by the ex-president Jefferson, then a lad, to our city, was in order to receive the variolous infection, and he lodged in a small cabin on the bank of the Schuylkill, while laboring under the disease.†

In the year intervening between December, 1729 and '30, there were interred in the city two hundred and twenty-seven persons of various sects. An account of the number of births during the same period would be an interesting document.

In February, March, and April, 1727, there appears from the bills of mortality to have been an unusual number of deaths, though I have not been able to find any reference to the prevalent disorder; and in 1732 the whole country again suffered from epidemic catarrh; in 1736-7 the city was afflicted by the occurrence of ulcerated sore throat.

Some time in the year 1740, Dr. Graeme was appointed, by the governor, physician to the port, and was required to attend the crews of unhealthy vessels. In the following year Dr. Zachary was appointed to the same station by the Assembly. This gave offence to the governor and council, who confirmed the former appointment of Graeme, and forbade Zachary to act.

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\* Watson's MSS.

† Ibid.

The winter of 1740-41 was very severe, and the succeeding summer the city was visited by a disorder which Noah Webster calls the American plague, and Dr. Bond says was yellow fever, but supposes it to have been introduced by a sickly ship-load of convicts from the Dublin jail. Previous to this it had been the practice to distribute sick emigrants among the inhabitants, at whose houses they received that attention their forlorn situation demanded. In this way, jail or ship fever was frequently communicated to the families with which they were quartered (or it was so thought at the time), and about this time a "Peste house" was erected on League Island.\* In 1747 Webster says the city again was visited by the "Bilious Plague," preceded by influenza, which very frequently prevailed over the whole continent.

The citizens frequently suffered from bilious remittent fevers, particularly while the dock remained open. This was a creek, running from near the centre of the city plot to the Delaware, following the course of Dock street; and was navigable at high tide so far as Chestnut and Fourth streets. At low water, however, its muddy bed was left exposed to the sun, and emitted a most noxious effluvium; and Dr. Bond asserts that fewer ounces of bark were taken after its closure than pounds before. As a preventive and cure for miasmatic diseases and their sequelæ, Dr. Bond lauds highly the mild chalybeate waters which abound in the neighborhood of the city; and by his

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\* Watson MSS. [This is a mistake; it was erected on Province, afterwards called Slate Island, at the mouth of the Schuylkill.—EDITOR.]



directions they were much resorted to, both by convalescents and those who wished to escape the "bleaching ague." Many facetious stories are told of the impositions that were practised upon those who, too unwell to walk to the springs out of the city, were directed to particular wells as possessing equal virtues. These springs seem early to have claimed attention, and were thought by the first settlers to equal the most celebrated spas of Europe. So early as the year 1722, the one now known as the Yellow Spring, in the Great Valley, was discovered, and much resorted to. There was one in the neighborhood of the Wind-gap in the Blue Mountain, which on the early maps of the State was called the Healing Spring, and marked by the representation of a number of tents pitched round it. There was another, situate near Bristol; and in the Watson MSS. one is noticed, situate near where the Globe Mill now stands, which received the patronage of William Penn, who caused accommodations for visitors to be erected, and hoped to see a village collect round it, which in anticipation he named Bath.\*

Having thus sketched a few rough notices of such facts as have come to my knowledge in reference to the Medical

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\* These were probably the waters to which Penn alludes in his letter to the Free Society of Traders, 16th 6th mo., 1683.

"3. The waters are generally good; for the rivers and brooks have mostly gravel and stony bottoms, and in numbers hardly credible. We have also mineral waters, which operate in the same manner, with those of Barnet and North Hall, not two miles from Philadelphia."

Those who may feel curious on the subject of the mineral springs in Pennsylvania, we refer to Watson's *Annals*, I., 489, *Ibid*, II., 463. — EDITOR.

History of the Province, prior to the year 1750, I now submit them to your consideration, in the hope, as before stated, to elicit further information. Our subsequent history may be more easily determined, and should not some one more competent to the task step forward, shall form the subject of a future communication from the author of the preceding.